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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 001011

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/27/2017
TAGS: ECON KS PGOV PINR PREL
SUBJECT: KORUS FTA IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY – RATIFICATION,
BUT WHEN?

Classified By: POL M/C Joseph Yun. Reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1.   (C) SUMMARY: The KORUS FTA, after the signing, will be
sent to the National Assembly for ratification. Pundits
consider this most likely in September. The ratification
process could be intense, involving protests and blockages.
Still, according to Assembly contacts, the KORUS FTA will
pass, but there is no consensus on when that might be. END
SUMMARY

AFTER THE AGREEMENT

¶2.   (C) After the KORUS FTA is signed (on or before June 30),
the ROK government will present the signed agreement to the
National Assembly for ratification. There are no time
restrictions in Korea on when the agreement must be submitted
to the Assembly, although according to pundits, the most
likely time for a vote on ratification is in September. The
Foreign Affairs, Unification and Trade Committee will first
discuss and vote on the agreement. If the agreement receives
majority support in the committee, it will go to the plenary
for discussion and vote. In a poll of Foreign Affairs
Committee members by the Munwha Ilbo newspaper, 17 out of 25
said they would support the KORUS FTA. The plenary vote will
likely be contentious. Currently a majority coalition of
opposition GNP and ruling Uri Party lawmakers support the
FTA. To ratify the FTA, a majority of the 299 lawmakers must
be in attendance and a majority of these lawmakers must
support the agreement.

GNP CANDIDATES

¶3.   (C) Professor Kim Woo-sang, foreign policy advisor to
presidential candidate Lee Myung-bak, told poloff that Lee
hoped the FTA would be signed and ratified as quickly as
possible. Kim said that since Korean people can only focus
on one issue for a maximum three months and knowing there
will be controversy surrounding the ratification of the
agreement, the goal was to ratify the FTA as far in advance
of the December 19 presidential election as possible. One of
Park Geun-hye's advisors told poloff that Park also hoped for
a quick ratification of the FTA and predicted that Koreans
would watch the FTA ratification process in the U.S. closely.
 He added that ratification in the ROK was likely in the fall

despite strong resistance that might emerge.

OPPONENTS OF THE FTA

¶4. (C) Rep. Choi Jae-cheon, a member of the Foreign Affairs
Committee, told poloff that he was certain that the FTA would
not be ratified in 2007. While Choi has come out vocally
against the FTA, he noted privately that he expects the FTA
would ultimately be ratified and would help Korea's economy
and its relations with the U.S. His goal in opposing the FTA
was to get the best agreement and, thereafter the best safety
net for those affected negatively by the FTA. Choi, part of
a splinter group of ex-Uri lawmakers led by former Justice
Minister Chun Jung-bae, said Chun would continue his anti-FTA
hunger strike until he was hospitalized. There are currently
55 out of 299 lawmakers firmly and publicly opposed to the
FTA. If others join them, while it was not likely they would
attain a majority, they could block the vote from occurring
on the Assembly floor.

COMMENT

¶5. (C) For now pundits are predicting the KORUS FTA will be
ratified this fall. This prediction, however, depends on the
continued public support for the agreement. Latest polls
show a range of support for the agreement from 50 to 63.6
percent. Also a factor is action in Washington. If the U.S.
ratifies the agreement, it could provide more impetus for
ratification in Korea.
VERSHBOW